

Tentative Hand

by DirectionOfTime

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Summary: Kondou Saya has had feelings for the First Division Captain for a long time, but there seem to be a awful lot of obstacles to overcome in just getting close to him!

Tentative Hand

Ok! This was requested one-shot for alias: _Hevensdarkangel_ [on Quizilla], although I hope everyone who reads this enjoys it!

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><p>My Peace with the World is Held by a Tentative Hand

Hakuouki Shinsengumi Kitan: Souji

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><p>Saya, stretching whilst stifling a yawn, made her way out of her room and down into the garden; the sun hadn't quite yet made its way over the horizon which meant that she was sure to find some peace. Taking a seat on one of the rocks which surrounded the small pond, she focussed her eyes on the water and allowed her mind to replay and reanalyse the information she'd learned a few days ago. She was running a quick errand for Chizuru (who was busy hanging out clothes to dry) as she turned a corner but abruptly halted as she could hear two familiar voices;<p>

"Let's talk over here, Souji-san," _That sounds suspiciously like Dr. Matsumoto... why would he want to talk to Souji like this?_ Saya, in

a bout of irresistible curiosity, darted behind a tree which was close to the compound wall; she slid down, hiding herself completely from view by the tree and underbrush as well as calming herself: an anxious presence would give her away far faster than anything else. They walked right up to behind her and they began to speak, not at great length but said more in a handful of sentences than most men could in speeches. Saya half cursed her curiosity and half praised it:

Souji.

Okita Souji was dying of tuberculosis.

How long did he have? A while, hopefully if he was still up and around as well as _making jokes_; Saya could feel the grip on her at the thought of his now so obvious mortality. She'd always known, of course she had; just as she was aware of her own mortality " they were part of the _Shinsengumi_ and all of them, quite literally, lived on a blade edge.

(Herself and Sanosuke more on the tip of an arrow or a spear, but it all added up to the same thing.)

Maybe it was more of a shock to think of him finally succumbing _not_ in the heat of battle, but weak and frail on a futon; it was so very unlike the strong and honourable Souji. Saya was suddenly overcome by the urge to go and speak to him, to go and sit with him as they chatted. Definitely _not_ to comfort him or dote on him and tell the _samurai_ that 'everything was going to be okay' and that 'I'll look after you,' " that would wound his pride and probably drive her insane.

Souji was a man who lived for others over himself and she knew that he would go on fighting with his sword and his life for as long as he were able. But Saya found herself suddenly wanting just to sit by his side and share jokes with him as they _far too occasionally_ would. Unfortunately it would seem that Chizuru got there first and she allowed her fear of his death to show through, _don't make him feel worse_, Chizuru, the man has his pride and he needs to know he's still strong even if that noise from him sounds like laughter; focus on how he feels about this rather than how you do!_

The youngish woman allowed an audible sigh to pass her lips as she floated out of the memory; a part of Saya was awkward with Chizuru as she wanted the slightly younger female to understand her desire to allow Souji to keep his dignity; and looking permanently worried and as though he may drop stone dead with so much as a gust of wind was not the right way to go about it.

She didn't think she could really explain that to the only other female here without it somehow being known to Souji that Saya too listened in. That would only grate on him more. Saya sighed again and leaned back slightly, stretching her feet out a little as one hand took her weight stretched out behind her. The posture was very unlady-like and Isami-nii-san would no doubt give her a scolding for it, but it was comfortable with her knees still bent and body angle more to capture the warm sun,

"My, my, it must be my luck day to catch such a beautiful woman under the early morning sun," Saya imperceptibly, but involuntarily

clenched as her back snapped to attention and she sat up straight, turning her head to meet the unruly red hair of Souji whilst he took a seat next to her, cradling his sword against his shoulder.

Saya resisted a slight frown, wishing he wouldn't just say things like that to warm up Kondou's little sister; she'd far rather he said nothing of the sort " unless of course he genuinely thought she was beautiful.

A likely story! She thought sarcastically,
unfortunately.

"Morning, Souji, why are you up so early?" Souji met her gaze as she eventually spoke after his abrupt appearance;

"I'm perfectly capable of rising with the sun," He retuned, a solid expression was on his face, but complete disbelief was scribbled all over Saya's,

"Uh-_huh_," She could see the tiny twitch of muscles on his cheek, telling her he wanted to smile, but resisted; it only just occurred to Saya that he was actually close enough for her to see it,

"Why are you up so early? Usually Sano makes Heisuke come and drag you out of bed for breakfast," Saya couldn't resist the frown this time, and a vein was threatening to explode on her forehead,

"What? I don't usually need to be gotten out of bed, I know what time it is and I arrive precisely when I mean to! Che, this is that thanks I get for saving your ass so many times?" Souji couldn't resist a chuckle at her presumption (which was correct to a few instances, she was a hell of a crack shot with that bow, but he couldn't let her know that he knew he would've been killed a few times over if not for her impeccable timing " she never let him live it down " the great Okita Souji protected by a girl? Ha!). He raised a hand to ruffle her hair affectionately, his sense of masculinity immediately returning by how diminutive she felt next to him, he resisted her attempts to move his hand as he happily allowed it to linger on her soft hair.

Although he did carefully eye her already sizable vein-pop carefully as it grew even more, she really could pack a punch if he sufficiently angered her. Though it would go without saying that Kondou would kill him, but not before bludgeoning him, skinning him, chopping him into little pieces and feeding him to the nearest stray dog if he really hurt Saya. Not that he could bring himself to do so anyway, but he wasn't above slightly ruffling her feathers.

"Souji!" The sudden shout of Kondou snapped them both to attention, as the male whipped his hand away from her and rose to his feet in seconds,

"Kondou-san, how are you this morning? Your voice is in fine shape, I hear," His utterly deadpan response resulted in a slight eye-twitch from Kondou but little else; he really hoped that if he acted normally, then Isami wouldn't question him too much over touching his sister. No matter how chase, innocent for friendly a touch it was " Kondou really could be over protective at times.

Saya too found her feet, her irritation dampened by surprise; what the hell was it with people sneaking up on her this morning? Maybe she really should stay in bed for longer after the sunrise.

"Souji, gather your squad to head out on rounds immediately after breakfast," Souji bowed slightly,

"Of course," He wandered off without a second glance,
>"What were you doing out here?" Isami's question prompting his sibling to immediately roll her eyes;<p>

"Counting how many seconds it will take Sanosuke to rile up Heisuke this morning." She wandered off as well, but Isami slapped a hand on her shoulder, dragging her with him towards breakfast, clearly unimpressed with her answer, although disguised by his otherwise uncharacteristically good-humoured sibling manner.

Saitou, Hijikata and Sannan were already seated as Kondou and Saya joined them for breakfast and it didn't take long for Heisuke, Sanosuke, Shinpachi and Souji to make an appearance. They all took their respective seats with the squad leaders in the circle and Inoue, Saya and Chizuru just outside of the main group; Saya herself ending up (although back slightly) between Heisuke and Shinpachi. The latter took advantage of the younger male's typically ravenous morning hunger; sneaking his chopsticks over as Heisuke had his rice bowl raised, Shinpachi clasped the broiled saury resting innocently, but neglected on the plate. Not for long, as Heisuke lowered his bowl, he caught the tail of the fish disappearing over the edge of his little table,

"Shinpachi! That's my saury!"

"Well, I'm bigger than you, I need more to eat!" Saya watched in amusement at the excessively animated, trying to grab back the saury with his own chopsticks, but Shinpachi's greater dexterity kept the saury in his possession, "Shinpachi! Damnit!" Saya, seeing an opportunity of her own snuck her chopsticks underneath Shinpachi's raised arm, who was too busy teasing the younger male, as she gripped the fish.

"Here you are, Heisuke, let him have his saury," She spoke innocently but the cheeky smile betrayed her jousting as she placed the fish on Heisuke's vacant plate,

"But that is my saury!" Shinpachi exclaimed, indignant that she's pulled one over on him, he lowered the fish, almost to the point of allowing it to fall, as her expression displayed nothing by innocence,

"Yea! And I don't need you to protect me, Saya! I was getting it back!" Heisuke's offended,

"Oh, sorry, Heisuke, I didn't mean to be premature in rescu- I mean, underestimate your... fish rescuing abilities," She offered a shy smile and elicited a short laugh from most of the other members around the circle, a strong blush from Heisuke and mocking grin from Shinpachi.

Souji bowed his head as to hide the smile which threatened to show, Saya, much like Shinpachi and Sanosuke, really did know how to tease

Heisuke. It was probably just the unfortunate circumstances for him, being the youngest (and looking so diminutive compared to the rest of them) tended to bring out the brotherly instincts in the two. Usually the _worst_ brotherly instincts where they drove Heisuke to within an inch of his sanity â€" although Souji and most of the others had no doubt that it was only these miniature competitions of sorts which kept them sane from the stuffiness of Hijikata and Saitou. As exceptional men and _samurai_ as they were, they could be damn dull.

"Chizuru, are you joining us on the rounds today?" Toshizo's voice suddenly interrupted the extended squabbling between the men,

"I-if I may,"

"Very well, you will join Sanosuke and the Tenth Division,"

"Hai," Chizuru bowed politely from beside Saya;

"Saya, you're brother feel it would be better for you to remain here," Toshizo again spoke, directing his attention to the only other female of their group; eliciting an immediate frown from her â€" although she resisted a vein pop;

"I'll go stir crazy if I stay in all of the time... Saitou-san, may I join you and the Third Division on today's rounds?" Saya immediately turned to the solemn man beside her brother, who was about to take a sip of tea; he regarded the young-ish woman silently for a few moments. Saya held his gaze, trying to keep her raw irritation from being directed to the purple haired man, whilst she ignored the doubtlessly gnawing irritation inside a still passive looking Hijikata.

"...You may, Saya-san," Saya controlled her smile and instead bowed,

"Arigatou Gozaimasu, Saitou-san,"

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Saya, as typical, stayed towards the back of the group as she kept her eyes and ears wide open for anything unusual whilst doing her best not to make it obvious. She often found that most people were foolish enough to open their mouths, regardless of who was around, if they couldn't see anybody noticeably listening in. Their gait was slow and unthreatening but authoritative with Saitou leading the way and the other men in perfect formation and Saya last of all; she quite enjoyed being at the back of the group as it allowed her observe what was happening at the front whilst she prepared to engage the enemy.

She was, after all, and archer by nature and her first instinctual weapon was the bow and arrow â€" only resorting to her short sword if and when absolutely necessary. The natural tactician within her also liked being somewhat removed from a fight, usually her position allowed her to observe the fighting from a comfortable distance and predict the enemies next move, whilst helping out teammates who were too surrounded by enemies to defend and attack properly.

She allowed her eyes to fall over the citizens, who were happily

going about their own morning routines " some looked a little shifty as they set eyes on the _Shinsengumi_. Saya couldn't be sure if her observations were little more than conjecture and she didn't want to rush to a conclusion. _No, that guy definitely looks a little shifty, but is it an individual crime of his? Unlikely... the Choushuu? Could well be..._. Saya was about to open her mouth and attract Saitou's attention and get his perspective " he no doubt would have noticed by now, but someone beat her to it;

"Saitou-san, Saitou-san!" Chizuru suddenly appeared, skidding to a halt in front of a still passive and calm Third Division leader, her face was stretched to worry and her breath a little laboured, "Its Okita-san and his Division, some Satsuma Clan soldiers have attacked them!" The second Chizuru's voice had finished explaining the situation, the entire Division were already leaping away to Souji's aid, Chizuru not needing to explain where the First Division was, all squad leaders knew each other's routes to provide backup in a heartbeat.

As they closed in on the First Division's location, Saya could see what was happening clearly enough through the throng of people and she snuck off to find a vantage point. Leaping up onto a barrel at the side of a house and then nimbly further up onto the roof, she was now able to see what was happening. Obviously the Choushuu had planned the ambush as they seemed to surround the First Division no doubt using the particularly narrow street with alleyways either side to pincer them.

She observed carefully for a few moments, not allowing her desire to rush in and help protect her friend and defeat her enemies overwhelm her whilst she analysed the situation. Souji and his Division were quite literally in the thick of it, but managing to just about hold their own although the soldiers were many; Saitou and the group were helping to distract the enemy from the angle they had arrived by and therefore diverting a good percentage of the enemy leaving the First Division with only one angle to face the remaining enemy.

Saya's mind worked overtime as she was quick to observe what the purpose of the fight was " diversionary? Was it provoked? She couldn't be sure, but nonetheless, she pulled her bow off her back and fitted an arrow to it, her eye looking for the perfect target, as she scanned the crowd of blades and bodies. She could see Chizuru quivering in a corner, she looked worried, bordering on terrified as the occasional enemy advanced on her but one of the Shinsengumi men dispatched them before she could befall an injury. Quietly making a note to herself that she'd have to keep one eye on Chizuru, she spotted the perfect match for the arrow in her hand.

Swiftly, she pulled back on the bow string and carefully but speedily took her aim and released the arrow sending it surging towards its target. As it sailed, impossibly fast and accurately, it was in perfect time just as the man raised his sword to strike down and Souji was raising his own to stab the man, the arrow was faster and it ripped right through the man's heart as Souji's sword was barely a few inches from its target.

Surprised momentarily as the arrow stole his thunder, he turned his head just enough to catch Saya in his peripheral vision smiling innocently as her eyes seemed to scan the remaining crowd. He couldn't resist a sly smile from appearing on his lips as his eyes

momentarily connected with Saya's before his attention was forced away by another enemy, as he swung his sword and quickly despatched them.

He was definitely getting her back for that one.

Saya tried to steady herself as she refitted an arrow ready to attack, but her heart was beating wildly, that damn smile of Souji's was not only unexpected, but it was dangerously alluring; combined with such a look in his eye which she'd never seen Souji express, Saya found it as exciting as it was intimidating. She'd never had trouble imagining that look on him before, but it couldn't have compared with the real thing; such an intense gaze from him sent her heart into palpitations. Usually she prided herself on not getting flustered or allowing herself to be distracted by such matters " she was a warrior first and foremost, but Kami-sama! It wasn't often she got those sorts of looks from men full stop, let alone the very man she really wanted it to come from and it really was quite unnerving.

Both for the look itself, and what it could mean.

She let loose another arrow killing a Choushuu soldier as she contemplated the fact that she had really no idea whether the past few seconds had been good or bad. At any rate, now was most definitely not the time to be contemplating it and her remaining focus redirected to the fight, to see one of the men trying to flee.

He seemed to have been at the back the entire time, more observing rather than anything else; Saya took the opportunity to bury an arrow into his thigh to prevent his escape as she could see a few other Choushuu soldiers peeling off. Although one was awfully close to Chizuru and Saya only just had enough time to fit an arrow and release it into the man's back before the young woman befell a nasty blow, leaping to the ground she followed up on her strike to release Chizuru from the weight of the fallen enemy,

"T-thank you, Saya-san,"

"Its fine," She retuned shortly as she tucked away her bow and unsheathed her short sword " now she was in the middle of the battle and it was no place for a bow and arrow. She clashed swords with a few enemies but they were taken out from behind before she was able to deal a killing blow " much to her irritation, although she focussed mostly on keeping close enough to protect Chizuru, who looked a little overwhelmed, but not close enough to make her actions obvious. However, all too soon, the last of the fight had been ended and all of the Shinsengumi men had dispatched the remaining enemies " the few left alive were quick to take their own lives unfortunately leaving no opportunity for questioning.

They all soon dispersed and after having picked up the pieces so to speak, they all headed back towards the compound they were currently staying in, the walk back was relatively slow and Saya suspected that although there were no obvious injuries, some of the lower ranking men had been caught out.

"Thank you for providing back up for us, Saitou-san," The purple haired samurai nodded carefully, to the First Division leader as they

entered back through the gates; the men diffused to go their own ways.

"Saya!"

"Nani?" She turned around to set eyes on Isami, who was walking over to her,

"What happened? I heard you were caught in a fight with some of the soldiers from the Choushuu,"

"That's right and I think everyone's fine, no serious injuries sustained from what I could see," She explained easily, unsure why Isami was frowning,

"You shouldn't have gotten involved in the battle," She rolled her eyes,

"It was hardly a battle and I protected Chizuru â€" what do you expect me to do? Run away?"

"Yes," Saya's already unimpressed expression darkened into a frown as she turned to walk away from her brother,

"I'm not a little girl who needs protecting, Nii-san, I can hold my own," She walked away not bothering to wait for his reply, which was sure only to frustrate her more.

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><p>Souji, eventually deciding that he really couldn't stay in the water any longer, forced himself to his feet and slowly dried and redressed himself, not bothering to dry his hair properly, he decided that sitting on the set of steps for a few minutes would do him the world of good. He was enjoying the few minutes in the sunshine despite the hustle and bustle all around him, with morning rounds finished, the afternoon was subsequently devoted to cleaning the headquarters â€" by order of Doctor Matsumoto. Although Souji was currently shirking his duties to sit in the sun, he was pretty sure no one would pull him up on it; he could hear the sound of heavy but speedy footsteps scooting down the walkway behind him and he almost instinctually knew who it was, even without her needing to speak;<p>

"Phew!"

"All done?" He turned around slightly, to catch her gaze,

"Okita-san? What are you doing out here like that?" She immediately rushed over to the reclining samurai,

"I sweated in my sleep last night, so I took a bath and decided to sunbathe," Apparently not even his completely relaxed posture and voice helped Chizuru calm down any,

"I don't care how nice the weather is, you'll catch a cold if you stay out with wet hair!"

"Its fine, I can take it,"

"No. It's not okay, you should take better care of yourself," Souji averted his eyes from a still overly-concerned Chizuru across the courtyard to spot Saya randomly brushing leaves around, presumably helping to keep the place tidy and clean,

"You're just like Hijikata-san the way you're such a bossy worry-wart." He couldn't resist smirking at his own comparison; which apparently Chizuru wasn't much impressed with it either, as she moved behind him and pulled the small cloth out from his shoulders. Throwing it over Souji's head she rubbed vigorously, not really caring whether he wanted it dry or not,

"Chizuru-chan, why are you being so pushy?"

"No particular reason," Her voice was nondescript and the answer reasonable enough under typical circumstances, but Souji knew precisely why " _damn illness!_"

"That's enough, it's mostly dry anyway," He stood up quickly, thankfully Chizuru had pulled away fast enough so that she didn't get headbutted by the man. He swiftly retied his hair up as usual, leaving the messy bangs in place; a sudden thought struck him as he took a step away;

"I'd like to ask you something," He looked over his shoulder to meet her gaze, "Tell me, what do you think of my hairstyle?" She hesitated for a moment, but replied with a soft expression and a warm smile,

"I think it looks good,"

"Really? Great!" Souji grinned almost involuntarily at the compliment, "Thanks, actually I'm trying to copy Kondou-san,"

"You're right, your hairstyle is the same as his."

"Let's keep this our little secret," Souji raised his hand up whilst winking, knowing Chizuru would be true to her word; they were suddenly interrupted by a cheeky feminine voice behind them,

"So it's about 87-5 the number of times I've saved your ass and now you're even having to get your own hair dried? Are you losing your touch, Souji?" The man in question spun around to face Saya holding a sly grin on her face. She'd steeled herself against any awkwardness from the smile he'd given her earlier " knowing that it was probably one of those in-the-heat-of-battle-things.

Even though bringing up what she should have wisely avoided, wasn't exactly the best plan.

A smirk appeared on the read-head's face,

"Really? Because I heard that the score is... Hmm 90-2 in _my_ favour, Saya,"

"And what about today?" _Damnit! _"Are you including that in your inaccurate count?"

"You didn't save my ass today, you stole my thunder," He folded his arms as he looked at the young woman in front of him rolling her eyes,

"Souji, your timing was a little off, he would have struck you before you killed him," Her eyes quirked into a tiny frown, although the levity in her voice was still obvious, Souji's smirk softened into a more of a smile,

"Saya, I might start to think that you're underestimating me," He watched, internally amused and gratified as her expression flashed quickly to one of mild shock before it again morphed into one of compunction, although carefully covered in an attempt not to show off the fact that she'd inadvertently underestimated probably the greatest swordsman in the Shinsengumi;

"O-of course, I didn't mean that, Souji, I-I... suppose that I just had a different angle on things from where I was," She scratched the side of her head slightly in embarrassment, averting her eyes from him; he laughed quietly to himself and he placed his hand on her head and ruffled her hair slightly, grinning like a mad man when she raised her eyes to meet his;

"I'm very glad that I have you to watch my back though...And... I think you serve us best from that position outside of the throng of battle, where your exceptional skills are unsurpassed and that you are not so easily targeted," He grinned more generously and Saya wasn't quite able to fight down the blush before it appeared over her cheeks at not only a surprisingly generous compliment from the man but also his proximity "there couldn't have been more than a couple of inches between their faces. "We don't have to worry so much about you befalling an enemy's sword and we are better able to fight," He smiled again, unable to help himself at the endearing blush over her cheeks, he would have liked to have said '_I'_ but he felt it may give out a message he couldn't be sure she'd appreciate "much less reciprocate.

Internally sighing he stood up a little straighter and removed his hand, breathing a deep sigh into his lungs, strangely glad that Kondou hadn't interrupted them, hating it when he was stuck between respecting the great man which was Kondou, the leader of Shinsengumi and spending much enjoyed time with the woman in front of him.

"Well, I really should go and practice..." They met eyes once more as she nodded, her blush now faded her own small but charming smile at him before he wandered away silently wondering if he would ever mean anything more to her than _Okita Souji: First Division squad leader_.

Saya turned her back to Souji as he walked away, a strange combination of a heavily beating heart and a sense of gloominess hung over her, '_We don't have to worry so much about you befalling an enemy's sword and we are better able to fight,'_ Souji's words were nothing if not sincere, honest and directed at Kondou Isami's little sister. She grumbled under her breath as she began to thrust the broom violently at the leaves merely spreading them around in her irritation rather than into a neat pile, '_I should have known " I don't mean a damn thing beyond being the sister of the Shinsengumi's leader_, she groaned in aggravation. She'd foolishly gotten her hopes

up that after the smile he'd given her earlier during the fight that they'd grown a little closer " at least to the point where Souji would see an individual (as well as a woman preferably) rather than a direct relation to Kondou.

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><p>"Saitou-san?" The purple haired samurai averted his gaze slightly towards the woman behind him,<p>

"Saya-san," He turned away after his simple greeting and she took a few steps away, intending to carry on and not disturb the solemn man any more than she already had done, but apparently he had more to say,

"Have you noticed that Souji-san has seemed a little... _Gloomy_ recently?" Saya could help her eyes inadvertently widening in surprise, _shit! Has he noticed Souji's illness?_ She was extremely thankful that Saitou was looking away from her in that moment,

"H-has he? What makes you say that?"

"...It looked to me that he was carrying a heavier burden than usual when I saw him earlier, as though the world was weighing heavier on his shoulders than I have seen for some time... Although, perhaps I am misreading him," Saya felt both stabs of shock and remorse at Saitou's words, _has his illness really gotten to him that much? He seemed so vibrant and full of life recently..._

"Sou [I see]... What do you think may be wrong with him?" Although Saya couldn't see, Saitou had a small smile gracing his lips at that point,

"I can't be certain and as much as I would like to ask him, I believe that it would wound his pride for me to do so,"

"Yes... Uh, I mean no disrespect, Saitou-san, but I think you are right in that conclusion,"

"Hai... However, I do not think it would wound him for you to go and speak with him,"

"W-what?" Saitou now fully turned around to face her,

"You, Saya-san, you have always had a very close relationship with Souji-san and I doubt he would take any offence at you enquiring as to his well-being," Saya said nothing for a few moments, sheer willpower being the only thing which stopped her mouth flapping open and closed in her frantic search to find some sort of response, "Do you disagree, Saya-san?"

"Uh... Well, no, not really... But..." She wasn't entirely sure how to voice the fact that she couldn't easily speak to Souji not only for the fact that she didn't want him to realize she knew of his condition, but that she was beginning to feel ever more uncomfortable around the man.

"Saya-san, I genuinely believe that if Souji-san is shouldering a heavy burden, then you are the most likely to be able to offer him

some relief from it," She offered him a sheepish smile, which he returned with his own, diminutive one,

"Thank you, Saitou-san,"

"I believe that he is in his room... Why don't you go and speak to him now? There are no more rounds scheduled until tomorrow for his Division," Saya nodded mutely as she watched him turn and walk away, _what the hell am I supposed to do now? I can't enquire to his health without good reason and neither can I let him know that I know he's already caught something!_ Even though she didn't want to, Saya found her feet taking her ever closer towards Souji's room, she thankfully managed to find a way to allow her a detour before she ended up right outside, but it proved fruitless as she still hadn't thought of how to address the problem.

"Saya? Is that you?" He asked before she'd even fitted her hand to the handle,

"Yes,"

"Come in, then," She slid open the door to find Souji cleaning and sharpening his blade, sliding the door politely closed behind her and took a seat slightly nearer the door than him "unable to fully control herself in such uncharacteristic anxiety. He rubbed the blade in small circles over the stone as he momentarily flicked his eyes to her, "What can I do for you?"

"I just came to see how you were, I feel as though I haven't had a chance to speak with you recently," He nodded and drew down the blade once again,

"Sou, I've been well, mostly, just keeping up with life in general," Saya didn't respond at first as Souji wiped down and set aside his blade, turning to the young woman, "When was the last time you sharpened your sword?"

"What?"

>"Your sword, does it need sharpening?"<p>

"Uh, no, it's alright, I can sort it out later,"

"Come on, since everything is already laid out here, I might as well tend to your sword... Besides, I find it relaxing," Saya found her feet and walked over to him, unsheathing her sword at the same time and handing it to him,

"Not enough around here to keep you busy, eh?"

"Hmm... Unfortunately not, it would seem," Souji seemed to give an unusually pause coupled with a strange sense of resignation, as he prepared the sword, Saya took a seat considerably closer to him, this time,

"I hope that you haven't been bored, Souji... Maybe I should ask Nii-san to give you extra chores," She gave a childish grin,

"Heh, no, that won't be necessary," He gave a gently amused smile towards the young woman next to him her eyes averting from his down to his gentle attentions to the sword,

"Your technique is so different from mine," She spoke almost to herself as Souji allowed a breath of laughter to escape,

"That probably explains why the blade is so dull,"

"Hey!" An immediate vein pop threatened from her forehead but he quickly diffused the situation,

"It's alright, whenever you need it sharpening, you can come and see me," She twitched her mouth as though feigning having to consider his offer, "C'mere, I'll show you my technique," He motioned her to move a little closer as he shuffled aside, making space for her, she was hesitant at first but slipped beside him nonetheless, "The key is even pressure and small circles," Saya merely observed his large hands over her diminutive wakizashi [short sword] she could feel his eyes avert to her every now and then although she was near hypnotised by the small rhythmic movements. He soon finished and carefully handed the blade back to Saya, who accepted, eyed it carefully and re-sheathed it before bowing low to him,

"Arigatou, Souji," She rose back up with a light, thankful smile on her lips.

Souji, almost unable to help himself, suddenly leaned in and connected his lips to Saya's holding the pressure for a moment as he could almost feel the surprise on her; he was about to pull away as she suddenly tensed her own lips as her hands found the lapels of his yukata keeping him close. Surprised momentarily, Souji, without necessarily thinking clearly, allowed his hands to find her back and waist to tug her nearer him, whilst his tongue traced her bottom lip, desiring to get just a little closer to her. She returned his kiss as her hands crept slowly up towards his shoulders where she tentatively rested her hands, savouring their broadness and warmth, as she felt unable to taste enough of the man she'd wanted for so long; he abruptly pulled away, looking slightly panicked as he leaned right back,

"S-shit, I shouldn't have done that... Saya, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have..." He tried to stand but Saya kept her hands firmly on her shoulders, she could guess at the two most obvious ulterior reasons why he'd think it was wrong, but she needed to know, even as her back missed the warmth his hands had provided,

"Why? Why shouldn't you have?" He remained silent for a moment but the imploring in her eyes forced him to at least attempt an answer,

"I... Because I'm..."

"-Not up to full health?" His face darted from worry to confusion and guardedness, "I'm sorry, Souji, but I ended up over hearing you and Dr. Matsumoto talking..." She averted her eyes to the side in mild shame, not wanting but inevitably expecting a negative reaction from Souji,

"... Is that why you kissed back?" Her eyes flew up to meet his still guarded ones,

"No! No way! I... uh, to be honest, I've always liked you Souji but I was worried... especially after I over heard you and Dr. Matsumoto,

that if I ever told you " and you knew that _I_ knew, then... You'd just think that I was giving you sympathy... And it's not like that at all!" Souji heart immediately lightened at her words and found that he couldn't resist a slight chuckle at the seriousness and desperation he didn't often see in her eyes " her naturally relaxed - although occasionally fiery - temperament usually masking it;

"What?" She huffed slightly, a tiny pout inadvertently finding its way to her lips which only made him laugh a little harder; Saya began to pull her hands away, believe his laughter at her could only mean rejection of some description. She pulled her hands away but he swiftly caught one, closing his larger hand around hers tight enough so that she couldn't pull away, but not enough that it would cause even discomfort let alone pain. He could feel that her hand was still a cautious one but it seemed to give him a strength from somewhere,

"Saya, I have always wanted to be just a little bit closer to you... And have you look at me as more than just the First Division's captain," Saya couldn't resist her own grin as she shuffled a little closer, pulling her hands from his to wrap her arms around him, as he did the same resting his forehead on hers, "You know, I really shouldn't be kissing you... the turber-"

"Oh, quite being such a tease and kiss me, damnit,"

"You're starting to sound like Heisuke," An involuntary shiver ran through her at the thought of kissing the young male, she loved him of course but in a purely platonic and brotherly way; Souji couldn't bit back a laugh fast enough although Saya promptly cut him off by pressing her own lips to his, finally able to enjoy being so close to the elder male.

* * *

><p>:: Yo, for this I decided to leave out the '-san' in Saya's speech when she addresses Souji (and some others) as I thought that they would be close enough to begin with and that the sort of free-spiritedness and independence of Saya would mean that she is happier to drop those sorts of formalities with those she's close to (i.e. not for Hijikata or Saitou, though) but she would still be on the whole, respectful " unlike Chizuru who always uses the suffixes. I hope that was close enough to the character you envisioned and that it didn't interfere with your reading / enjoyment of this :D

I also hope that there weren't any errors in the chronology, the anime seems to have a few massive time-skips but I wasn't always able to see exactly how long these were, so I hope there weren't any major continuity / chronology errors!

End
file.